Understanding different – Training needs, communication modes and technical skills of multigenerational workforce in automobile industry

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Abstract

Expeditious technology advancement, communication modes and digitalization have increased the challenges for organization to manage its today's multigenerational workforce. In present era, organizations have three generations –Generation X, generation Y and Generation Z. Each cohort has varying ideas, experiences, needs and expectations. (Cekada, 2012). Therefore, organizations need to inclusively evaluate their workforces to align the method of training, communication and technical expertise with the needs of each generational cohort.

The paper aims to study the difference in training needs, use of communication modes and technical expertise among Generation X, Y and Z in automobile industry.

Key words: Automobile, communication modes, generations, training, technical skills, technological advancement.

1. Introduction

Today's workplaces are not only culturally diverse, but also generationally diverse. Each generation needs and expectations are different and understanding these differences is essential to manage this multi generation workforce. (Elkins et al., 2007).

In 21st century, the businesses are experiencing remarkable changes. The ability to anticipate and adapt to these changes is the only way for companies to guarantee their continued success and to achieve competitive advantage. Hence, it is necessary to focus on changing generations of workforce to understand them and work with them effectively.

1.1 Generation

According to (Hansen and Leuty, 2012) the term generation refers to a group of individuals who share their common work and life experiences. Every employee is not unique in terms of their skills, education, needs, values and expectations but also in terms of their age and personal know how. These differences deepen all the more even within generations.

1.2 Generation X

The generation is born between the period of 1960 and 1980. (Gardiner, Grace and King, 2015; Zemke, Raines and Filipezali, 2000). Generation X is resourceful and independent. They tend to seek balance between their work and personal lives and are motivated by consistent work values (Lancaster and Stillman, 2005). Extensive research also indicated that this generation has grown up

in the environment where both parents were working (Karp et al., 1999) or with only one parent due to increased divorce rate (Kupperschmidst, 2000). Due to this, the generational cohort has turned to small enclaves of friends for support. Generation X employees are highly educated, technology literate and fiercely independent. They have been characterized as "slackers" who "work to live". (Chao, 2005). Generation X is also characterized as ambitious and always eager to learn new skills. But they like to accomplish things on their own terms. (Kane, 2018).

1.3 Generation Y (also referred to as millennial or the next generation)

Generation Y is the first "global" generation. The people from generation Y have similar characteristics and attributes irrespective of their country origin. Generation Y refers to group who born between 1980 and 1995 (Horvathava, Blaha and Copiknee, 2016; Knight, 2015; Zemke, Raines and Filipckez, 2000). Generation Y believes that work is just the one priority in life, not the priority. They want minimal rules and bureaucracy, prefer openness and transparency. They favour indecisive style of management. Generation Y wants regular feedback and likes to face challenges. They seek a portable career and personal flexibility. They want a positive work climate. Generation Y is not afraid of expressing their opinions. (Earle, 2003; Knight, 2000). They are energised to take up new challenges. (Glass, 2002; Martin, 2005). This generation is extremely technology literate, self-reliant, independent and look for instant rewards. (Martin, 2005; Paul, 2001).

They live in the virtual world of computers, cell phones, instant messaging, the internet etc... (Oblinger, 2003). Moreover, Generation Y is a confident and optimistic group of people. They expect prompt feedback and continuous recognition for their work and also they maintain close relationship with their family and friends (Tyler, 2007).

1.4 Generation Z (also referred as Post Millennial)

Generation Z refers to group who born between 1995 and 2010. They have grown up with technologies like World Wide Web, mp3 players, short messages, you tube, I pads, and many others. (Kapil and Ray, 2014). Generation Z is happy, self confident, fit into the team spirit and are more interested in social activities than their previous generations. (Ozken and Solmaz, 2015). Generation Z is also referred as digital natives, multi-taskers, concerned about environment, get influenced by their friends about products and brands. They have ability to come up with innovations that match with changing times. (West, 2014). They are practical, intelligent, and brave and like to have changes. They look to the internet to solve any kind of problem. (Tari, 2011)

The population of this generation will be 30 million by 2019 and this is the new emerging workforce in the workplace. (Tulgan, 2013).

Generational Structure

Generations	Year of Birth
Generation X	1961-1980
Generation Y	1981 –1994
Generation Z	1995- 2001

Source: (Bejkovky, 2016)

In 21st century, the largest group of employees is representative of the three generations – Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z. This is the reason that the research includes only representative of these three generations.

1.5 Training Needs

To erect productive multi-generational workforce, organizations must provide training as per their need, when they need it, and in a way, that will maximize their learning and success in the job.

Research has proved that generational differences must be considered by the organizations while providing training to employees. (Beaver and Hutchings, 2005) had reviewed research on training and development of diverse age workforce in small scale enterprises and found that Generation X and Generation Y are different in many aspect of their training and development requirements and organization must provide conducive programs as per their needs.

Each generation has unique characteristic, ethics, values, experiences, that affect its members how they interact, communicate and learn in the workplace and hence, it's important to understand and embrace each generation to provide them training as per their needs and requirements for the job. Cekada(2012) in his paper assert the same that workplaces in today's era have employees from multiple generations. Each generation has different ideas, values and experiences that compel organizations to evaluate their employees and be flexible to provide improve training to each generational group as per their unique requirements.

Moreover, Mccarthy recommended that the essential part of training multi - generational workforce is to understand your audience, and also consider various dimensions like generation, culture, personality, life experience and education to provide valuable training to them for success and development.

Training participants may be from diverse generations, thus, it is imperative to identify the training needs of employees from multi-generational workforce and create customized training program for each generation.(Cekada,2012). Thus leading us to hypothesize : Each Generation has different training needs.

To validate the hypothesis, training and development needs in the questionnaire were asked according to top eight training needs Reported Manchester Tnc. , Jacksonvilla FF, 2000.

1.6 Technical Skills and Abilities

The new generation born in the digital world is totally dependent on technology for everything in their life, be it education, socialization or entertainment etc.. Because of these reasons this generation is also termed as Digital natives. But, the older generation needs to learn new technical skills and imbibe the ability to work in a digital environment

Research studies reviewed on this subject have been also indicated the same.

The study of Iliev et al. (2017) suggests that Generation Y and Generation Z are born in the era of technology. They considered e-learning to be an essential tool to improve further skills and gain

knowledge. Now for them education and training is no more limited to the four walls of the classroom. Therefore, for these generations, e-learning becomes an imperative tool for professional development and education.

The young generation is so immersed in the digital world that they are not present enough in the real world. They have created virtual world for themselves. Whereas the older generation still use the digital method in a limited way. The study of Behrstock-Sherratee and Coggshall (2010) indicates the same. The older Generation X goes online only for work accomplishment whereas Generation Y goes online and offline consistently and does not make distinction between one and the other.

Moreover, Elmore (2010) had revealed greater differences between generations with regard to use of cell phones. According to the study, of adult age 65 and older, just get 5% all of their calls on a cell phone and only 11% sometimes use their cell phones to text. For generation younger than age 30, 72% use their cell phones for call and 82% use to text.

Changes in the market place, workplace and society can been observed due to use of social media by generation Y and also the use of social media by the young generation will result into new business models, processes and products (Boltan et al.,2013)

Another research has done on new generation of library professionals, to understand the kind of new skills and competencies they require due to fast changing digital age and the research found that the new generation librarians must learn new technical skills and methods to be competent and to work effectively and efficiently.(Nonthacumjane, 2011).

It is also imperative for employees to reinvent themselves by gaining knowledge about new technology and implement it in their work because the workforce of knowledge workers will dominate the organizations in future. Organizations need to inculcate new technical skills and abilities in their multi-generational workforce, specifically for older generation of workforce as they perceived to have scarcity of technological and scientific progression. (Ebrahimi et al., 2008). Hence, digital transformation is no longer a niche; it has become a necessity across industries. The fast paced technology has changed the way organizations work and digitalization era has made biggest difference among generations.(Cekada,2012)Thus implies for us to pospulate : Each generation has different technical skills and abilities.

To validate the hypothesis, the statements were framed in the questionnaire from literature review.

1.7 Communication

People use different modes of communication as per their generational background. Communication modes have also been changed over time. Generations have been connected through cellphones, laptops, and similar devices and can communicate with others anytime and anywhere. (Behrstock-Sherratre and Coggshell,2010). Furthermore, the new generation enjoys social interaction through instant messaging, blogging, texting and e-mails. The fact has also been proved by studies of (Matulich, 2008; McGlynn,2005:Raines,2003:Tucker,2006) that Generation Yare described as social learners. Moreover, this generation respond to methods that are more

horizontal and informal, rather than formal and vertical. (Hanna, 2003). Whereas Older Generation prefers open, direct and less formal. They enjoy the group processing of information and value staff meeting that provides opportunity for discussion (Zemke et al., 2000). Also, they prefer face to face and telephonic communication and use e-mail only if they are comfortable with technology. (Duchsher et al., 2004;   Weston, 2001;   Zust, 2001). Similarly, the study of Karp et al. (2002) revealed that Generation X is the first generation to have television as a part of their daily lives. Communication that involves technology started appealing to   them. However, Generation Y has grown up with instant messaging and cellular phones. They like immediate feedback and may become frustrated if their e-mails or telephonic messages are not answered quickly. (Sack,2006). Other study by Carlson (2005) asserts that Generation Y appreciate meetings as aforum of communication. E-mails and chat rooms are good modes of communication for providing updates .Thus this leading us to hypothesize: Each Generation prefers different modes of communication based on their technological background.

To validate the hypothesis, statements in the questionnaire were framed from literature review.

2. Methodology

2.1 Questionnaire

The statements were framed from the literature review to assess the training needs, technical skills and abilities and communication modes of white collar workforce of the automobile industry. The instrument used in the study consisted of two sections - the first section of the questionnaire asked for demographic information like age, gender, experience, Origin of the company (Indian company or Foreign company), and nature of work – production or service oriented. These were measured on a nominal scale. Age is grouped into six levels – upto 50 years, 25-30 years, 35-40 years, 41-50 years, 51-60 years, above 60 years to put the respondents into appropriate cohort.

The second section of the questionnaire consists of 16 statements representing top eight training needs, technical skills and abilities require due to technological changes, and use of communication modes in digital era by employees at workplace. The section uses a five point likert scale for self administration of responses ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

The pilot study was conducted on 95 employees from white collar workforce of three generations (i.e. Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z) working in the automobile industry in NCR region. The reliability test was done on the data from the pilot study. The reliability was checked by applying cronbach's alpha. The value of cronbach alpha was ascertained.

Table 1. The reliability test of research parameters

Parameters	Number of Items	Alpha Value (P)
Training Needs	8	.871
Technical skills and abilities	4	.773
Communication Modes	4	.826

The validity of the questionnaire established using a panel of experts who review the questionnaire and concludes that if it measures the trait of interest (Bolarinwa, 2015). Considering the belief, in the present study the questionnaire was assessed and approved by the two industry and three academic experts.

2.2 Data collection

For collecting the data, various companies were selected from North Central Region (I.e. Delhi, Gurugram, Faridabad, Noida). A total of 500 questionnaire were floated through snow ball sampling to collect data from white collar workforce of three generations of selected automobile companies. First, employees who are fresher or trainees in the company, of between age 21- 29 years old, with 6 months to 4 years of experience. They come under Generation Z. Second, employee who are middle management position, of age in between 30- 39 years old., with 5-14 years of experience. They fall under the Generation Y cohort. Third, employees who are older in the organization, handling senior or middle management position, of age in between 40-50 years having 15-25 years of experience. They come under Generation X cohort.

Questionnaires were sent both in hard and soft copies form. Some of the companies were very helpful and distributed questionnaire to their employees. While for other companies emails and telephone was extensively used to make them understand the purpose of research and assure them that data so provided will be used only for academic research. Information was finally gathered. Only 400 questionnaires were received. Out of which only 357 were usable and the rest were discarded due to incomplete information.

Thus, with unconditional assistance of various associates, data was collected comfortably from the respondents working in automobile industry.

2.3 Demographic profile

The participants comprised of three generations of white collar workforce from automobile industry. The number of respondents belong to generation X were 94, Generation Y were 124 and Generation Z were 139. Out of which Generation X has one female respondent and 93 male respondents. Generation Y has 98 male respondent and 26 female respondents and Generation Z has 97 male respondents and 42 female respondents. This indicates that the automobile industry is male dominated. The newly release survey report on Gender Diversity in 2018 by En-World (A consultancy and recruiting firm) has also mentioned that "the automobile industry remains to be male dominated with only 7% of females in the industry at mid-senior level position."

Among generation X respondents, 6 were working with an Indian automobile company and 88 were working with foreign companies. In Generation Y, 10 were working with Indian and 114 were working with foreign companies and in Generation Z, 115 were working with foreign and 24 with Indian companies. In context of nature of job, the respondents of generation X, 77 were performing core production jobs and rest 17 were in service oriented jobs. In generation Y, 98 were in production jobs and 26 were in service jobs. In Generation Z, 80 were in production and 59 were in service jobs. As per Automobile industry experts, "The industry provides 75% core manufacturing (production) related jobs and 25% non manufacturing (service) related jobs."

3. Analysis

3.1 Hypothesis 1:

Ho: There is no significant difference among Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z in regard to their training needs.

Ha: There is significant difference among Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z in regard to their training needs

Eight Top Most Training Needs are:

- Leadership Development: Leadership training increases the capacity of employees to be successful in leadership roles of any company. It is a great way for managers at all levels to improve their ability to inspire and motivate individuals and teams to achieve outstanding business results.

- Interpersonal Skills Training: gives the skills that are needed to build and foster empowering relationships. Keeping positive interpersonal relations with colleagues ensure that an environment of productivity and success at work is created.

- Communication Skills: is undoubtedly the most significant skill that can substantially increase the growth of an organization. It emphasizes on several techniques that impact effectiveness to attain their organizational goals. When there is compromise in communication, there is an immediate effect on the bottom line. Therefore, this is a training program that all companies focus on the for employees evolution.

- Problem Solving Skills: focus on enabling individuals to learn a set of tools and practices that enable them to diagnose and solve problems effectively at the workplace. Being able to creatively use problem solving techniques is an important business as it is integral to handling challenges. There are those that are part of everyday business and those that effect long term strategic direction. In whatever form they may arise; one thing in certain, problem solving must dealt with a root cause level, successful businesses have come to learn how to view and deal with problem by developing effective problem solving skills.

- Customer Relationship Management Training: is a business approach that includes the practices and strategies a company uses to determine the best ways to manage and

maintain business relationships and interactions with customers, clients, partners and prospects.

- Team work Skills: learners discover how teams evolve, understand colleagues better, improve communication skills, play to different strengths and improve their team's performance through team building activities.

- Change Management training: will provide leaders and managers with clear insights on how to effectively motivate people through corporate culture or organizational change. It will also equip them with some effective skills and knowledge for managing and communicating change.
- The training also helps to develop critical skills for effectively implementing change in the workplace.

- Management Skills training: there are certain attributes and abilities that an executive should posses in order to fulfil specific tasks in an organization. They include the capacity to perform executive duties in an organization while avoiding crisis situations and promptly solving problems when they occur.
- This skill helps mangers   relate with their co-workers and know how to deal well with their subordinates, which allows for the flow of activities in the organization.
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Table 2 Shows one way ANOVA to investigate the difference among Generation XGeneration Y and Generation Z in regard to eight training needs.

Parameters	Generation Groups	N	Mean (SD)		Df	F Value	Sig
Leadership Development				Between Groups	2	1.816	0.164
	Generation X	139	4.12 (.971)				
	Generation Y	124	4.26 (.805)	Within groups	354		
	Generation Z	94	4.05 (.911)	Total	356		
Interpersonal Skills				Between Groups	2	0.379	0.685
	Generation X	139	4.13 (.858)				
	Generation Y	124	4.22 (.792)	Within groups	354		
	Generation Z	94	4.15 (.798)	Total	356		
Communication Skills				Between Groups	2	2.451	0.088
	Generation X	139	4.18 (.855)				
	Generation Y	124	4.42 (.755)	Within groups	354		
	Generation Z	94	4.33 (.744)	Total	356		
Problem Solving Skills				Between Groups	2	0.949	0.388
	Generation X	139	4.19 (.859)				
	Generation Y	124	4.34 (.785)	Within groups	354		
	Generation Z	94	4.30 (.777)	Total	356		

Customer Relationship Management	Generation X	139	4.09 (.935)	Between Groups	2	0.229	0.796
	Generation Y	124	4.16 (.830)	Within groups	354		
	Generation Z	94	4.15 (.884)	Total	356		
Team Work	Generation X	139	4.14 (.875)	Between Groups	2	1.488	0.227
	Generation Y	124	4.31 (.778)	Within groups	354		
	Generation Z	94	4.30 (.768)	Total	356		
Change Management	Generation X	139	3.78 (.974)	Between Groups	2	0.236	0.79
	Generation Y	124	3.85 (1.060)	Within groups	354		
	Generation Z	94	3.77 (.895)	Total	356		
Management Skills Training	Generation X	139	3.89 (1.000)	Between Groups	2	3.251	.040*
	Generation Y	124	4.14 (.940)	Within groups	354		
	Generation Z	94	4.21 (.931)	Total	356		

*Significant at the 5%level of Significance

From the ANOVA table we can conclude at the 5% level of significance, there is no significant difference for acquiring Leadership skills, interpersonal skills, communication skills, problem solving skills, customer relationship management skills, team work skills, change management skills across three generations.

However, the research has found significant difference for acquiring management skills training across three generations.

Multiple Comparisons for Management Skills Training

**Table 3 shows Post hoc Tukey HSD test that indicates difference within the three generations.**

Generations (I)	Among Generations (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Generation Z	Generation Y	.072	.117	.813
	Generation X	.315*	.126	**.035***
Generation Y	Generation Z	-.072	.117	.813
	Generation X	.243	.129	.145

Generation X	Generation Z	-.315*	.126	**.035***
	Generation Y	-.243	.129	.145

*Mean difference is significant at the 5%level

Graphical Representation
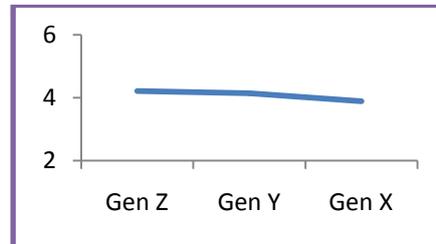
Based on Tukey test for multiple comparisons, there is significant difference between the Generation X and Z for the need of management skills training. Generation Z score higher on the management skills training scale implying that they require the training for acquiring management skills as compared to Generation X.

3.2 Hypothesis 2:

Ho: There is no significant difference in the technical skills & abilities and use of communication modes of Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z due to influence of technological changes (Digitalization).

Ha: There is significant difference in the technical skills & abilities and use of communication modes of   Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z due to influence of technological changes (Digitalization).

The present study examined that due to rapid changes in technology whether the three generations are acquiring upcoming technical skills & abilities, using new modes of communication.

- Upcoming technical & abilities – Use of social networking sites, knowledge of global trends, and using latest programs and applications.
- Communication Modes – Instant messaging, Video conferencing, Virtual networking, Cloud technology.

Table 4 shows one way ANOVA to investigate the difference among Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z for technical skills and abilities.

Parameters	Generation Groups	N	Mean (SD)		Df	F value	Sig.
Technical skills and abilities	Generation X	139	15.8 (2.93)	Between Groups	2	0.067	0.936
	Generation Y	124	15.9 (2.46)	Within groups	354		
	Generation Z	94	15.9 (2.79)	Total	356		
Communication Modes	Generation X	139	16.2 (3.00)	Between Groups	2	0.657	0.519
	Generation Y	124	16.6 (2.49)	Within groups	354		
	Generation Z	94	16.2 (2.70)	Total	356		

*Significant at the 5%level of Significance

From the ANOVA table we can conclude at the 5% level of significance, there is no significant difference for acquiring upcoming technical skills and abilities, using new modes of communication due to digitalization across three generations.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Hence, from the above results, the research has shown that all the three generations of white collar workforce in automobile industry need seven trainings (leadership skills, interpersonal skills, communication skills, problem solving skills, customer relationship management, team work, change management) to go up the ladder of success. However, Generation Z has shown more interest for acquiring management skills as they are young and new in the management field and thus have more requirement of Management skills training.

It is also evident that the three generations of white collar workforce in automobile industry are pragmatic towards technological changes (digitalization) in their organization. They all are actively learning and using new techniques of work and new ways of communication.

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